

D R A F T

Meeting Minutes, 3/16/06

Committee for Citizen Involvement

CCI Members Present: Sue Carver, Basil Christopher, Teddi Duling, Bev Froude, Brian Kelly, Bill Scheiderich

CCI Members Absent: Rick Parker, Trisha Swanson, Stacie Yost

Staff Present: Liz Newton, Duane Roberts

Guests Present: Karen Twain, Ted Feller

1. Welcome and Introductions

Committee Chair Basil Christopher called the meeting to order at 7:05 PM.

2. Approval of Minutes

Basil asked committee members to forward any meeting minute emendations directly to Duane after the meeting. [None received.]

3. Public Involvement in Local Schools

Basil introduced this item by asking each of the two guest speakers to introduce themselves to the committee.

Karen Twain, introduced herself as the principal of Metzger Elementary School. She mentioned that that her background includes some twenty years of experience in the public school system. She went on to explain that the use of volunteers within the school district varies by individual school. At Durham Elementary, her previous school, a one-to-one reading program was the major volunteer activity.

Metzger, her present school, is the highest poverty school in the district. One-third of Metzger's 500 plus students are non-English speaking. Fifty per cent of the students are minority group members, with Latinos and [Pacific] Islanders representing the largest groups. In terms of national origin, the children come from 25 different countries. Sixty per cent of the students are eligible for the federal free and reduced cost lunch program. Some 5% of the children are homeless or have a parent who is incarcerated. Volunteers, whom she described as "easy to recruit", help with tutoring in reading, posting readerboard updates, "maintenance around the school", parent-coffee meeting arrangements, and other activities. The school

maintains active business partnerships. These partnerships are a source of many of the volunteers.

Basil asked about the school's outreach to minority parents, many of whom may not come to regular parent meetings. Karen responded that the school puts on special parent nights geared to the Latino population. Transportation and child care are the greatest barriers to the participation of these parents. To overcome these barriers, the school "sends buses around" to transport the parents to and from the meetings and provides babysitting at the school. [Pacific] islander families are the most difficult group to reach out to.

Ted Feller began his presentation by noting that he is in his second year as the principal of Fowler Middle School and in his twentieth or so year as a teacher/administrator. He commented that in Portland, the school defines the neighborhood. He also mentioned that the federal government funds programs intended to connect the community to the local school.

The Fowler attendance area stretches from one end of the City to the other, from Bull Mountain to I-5. Present enrollment is 945 students. The amount of parent involvement in the school varies by area. Bull Mountain parents "demand" involvement in the school. The parents of students residing in the area east of the school are not as connected.

Fowler is the hub of central Tigard. The campus and facilities are heavily used by the community. The parking lot is full day and night. As a result of this interaction, the neighborhood and area around the school "understand kids." Generally speaking, middle school-aged children exhibit a different set of behaviors toward people who they feel know and understand them. This well developed "community interfacing" contributes to "the children's sense of interconnection with the community." The presence of parent volunteers in the school strengthens the message that students are important to the community. The "better the bonding with the community", the stronger the foundation for the kids. The school promotes the message that it wants the whole community, parents and non-parents, to be involved in the school.

The Fowler Parent School Organization, or PSO, meetings typically draw 100 parents. The participating parents are all from the Woodard and Bull Mountain areas. Bull Mountain parents provide a lot of passion and energy. "If you don't set an agenda or define a mission, they will do it for you." The school PSO recently sponsored a carnival to raise funds for a girl with leukemia.

Ted commented that the lack of involvement in the schools on the part of Latino parents relates to their cultural backgrounds. Most are from Mexico, where the cultural norm is for parents not to be involved in the schools. Overcoming this

mind-set is difficult. These parents are trained “to not ask the teacher any questions.” Other barriers to participation are language and transportation.

Fowler is a microcosm of the community. Its service area includes a big variance in the economic circumstances and cultures of the families residing within it. How to engage all families in school programs and activities is a challenge. At the same time, parents of the children who come to this country tend to want to be part of the majority culture.

Basil mentioned that he hoped that the new Neighborhood Program would help change and improve the dynamics of the neighborhood-school relationship.

Bill asked about the utility of sponsoring a school-specific website to reach parents. Karen commented that her population is “not accustomed to using the media.” As an example, she mentioned that on the weekday in March when the start of school was delayed by two hours, 80% of the students showed up at the regular time. This was despite the television, radio, and district web page announcements about the two-hour inclement weather delay. According to Karen, word of mouth is the most effective method for getting the word out to her population.

Bill asked what the schools want households without school-aged kids to know about the schools, such as their hours of operation, and what these household members should look out for. How do you communicate with households without kids? Ted responded that the two ways the district uses to give out information is through the internet and school newsletter. Some 80% of Fowler families have internet access. As a principal, he would like the “general community to be aware of what’s going on in the school and of when kids are not in school when they should be.” Ideally, “everyone should watch out for kids.” Karen mentioned that Metzger puts out a weekly newsletter. She emphasized that the schools should not be providing information to the community only at election time.

Basil discussed the idea of providing a City website for each neighborhood group. Bill brought up the idea of a street address search feature on the City webpage that would link the user to the neighborhood page corresponding to the users address.

Teddi mentioned that she was involved in a Lewis and Clark College food and health fair that was designed to attract a diverse community. She wondered whether this same idea might be applicable to a school outreach program.

Karen mentioned that minority groups are on the receiving end of a lot of programs. She focuses on finding things they can do for other people, i.e., community service projects that allow them to “volunteer and do something” for others.

Brian commented that he is very supportive of finding ways to build a sense of community. Basil stated that the neighborhood program is important to this idea.

Brian stated that he was very supportive of finding ways to bring the schools and community together. Basil commented on the role of the Neighborhood program in strengthening the school/neighborhood relationship.

4. CCI/Council Joint Meeting Results

Basil briefed the group on the results of the February CCI meeting with Council. He mentioned that three CCI members, Teddi, Bev, and himself, attended the meeting. Councilor Woodruff asked the CCI members present what they wanted Council to do with the recommendations included in their annual report. “What is the expected outcome?” Craig Prosser, the City Manager, mentioned that the recommendations had been reviewed at a recent executive staff meeting, and that department heads had been directed to follow up on recommendation pertaining to their departments. Liz has been assigned responsibility for assembling the responses and reporting back to Council on them in May.

5. Neighborhood Program Update

Liz Newton, City Assistant to the City Manager, gave an update on the Neighborhood program. The program will include a neighborhood webpage. School officials like the idea of a City webpage link to the school webpage. Beaverton school district officials also have been contacted and are supportive of a link to their webpage. The same is true of Tualatin Valley Fire District administrators.

Basil discussed the use of separate servers to facilitate the creation of neighborhood-specific webpages.

Liz went on to say that three pilot programs will be created. The next step is neighborhood organizational meetings within each of the three neighborhoods to develop their programs. She received “good feedback” at an initial city-wide organizational meeting attended by twenty people. As a lead-up to the neighborhood meeting, Liz intends to go to meetings of two parent-student organizations within the pilot area boundaries in order to promote the new program. Personal contact is the most effective approach to recruiting participants.

In response to a question from Basil, Liz commented that she is developing a web-based informational newsletter.

She likes the connection with schools. Schools should be more open and function as community centers. Schools should be integrated into neighborhoods. They should serve the community as a resource.

Brian commented that community residents may look to the neighborhood program to provide volunteer opportunities and enable them to keep their volunteer time in the neighborhood.

6. Other Business/Announcements/Next Agenda

Ideas for future agenda topics included an update on the search for long term water sources; a follow-up report on the CCI's list of recommendations submitted to Council; possible City newsletter topics, such as "junk in neighborhoods"; adding a running police log on the web, and information on plans for a comprehensive plan website.

The chair adjourned the meeting at 8:30 PM.